

RELATIONS

Ontology and Philosophy of Religion

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1. RELATIONS IN BRITISH IDEALISM

1. *The troubled status of relations*

Ontology and logic long regarded relations with some reservation or unease. This was the case for several reasons: (i) it partly depended on Aristotelian metaphysical legacy; (ii) partly on technical difficulties in their logical treatment; (iii) and partly on the empiricist/associationist view according to which relations are the product of the mind.

As regards (i). In the framework of Aristotle's doctrine of categories, relations are a non-substantial category, and therefore have a lower ontological status – so to speak – than substances. But relations seem to have an even lower ontological status than other non-substantial categories, such as quality. Sure enough, according to Aristotle the universal quality *whiteness* may in a sense be considered to be *in* a substance, and insofar as it is in a substance, it partakes – at least to some degree – in the being of the substance itself. Relations are less easily localizable in space, and their connection with substances is consequently weaker, so that their ontological status will be very low. Relations are, therefore, “the least real” of categories (see *Met.* 1088a20-22, 29-34).

As regards (ii). Traditional (syllogistic) logic encountered difficulties in dealing with all types of inferences involving both nested quantifiers and relations. Special cases could be taken care of by means of different maneuvers (such as the theory of *suppositio*), but no general solution seemed to be available. The problem could be swept under the carpet, so to speak, through the assertion that relations can ultimately be reduced to properties, since a first-order sentence containing only monadic predicates can always be reformulated as a sentence free of nested quantifiers, and can thus be treated successfully by traditional logic. This circumstance undoubtedly enticed many philosophers and logicians to ignore relations altogether.

Whereas factors (i) and (ii) operated through almost the whole history of philosophy, factor (iii) operated in a more limited context,

yet relevant for British idealism – as we shall see. According to Locke, relations are ‘not contained in the real existence of things, but [are] something extraneous and superinduced’ (*An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, 4th ed., 1700, II, xxv, 8); they have ‘no other reality but what they have in the minds of men’ (II, xxx, 4): among mind’s activities is that of ‘bringing together two ideas, whether simple or complex, setting them side by side so as to see them both at once, without uniting them into one; this is how the mind gets all its ideas of relations’ (II, xii, 1). It seems that for Locke relations come to coincide with *ideas of* relations. This is the reason for which in the tradition influenced by Locke (i.e., empiricist philosophy and associationist psychology) there is a tendency to regard relations as “unreal”, insofar as they are ultimately produced by the mind. Alternatively, an even more radical solution was occasionally put forth by associationist psychology: the complete elimination of relations, by considering them supervenient on the perception of particulars endowed with qualities. This reductionist initiative proceeds along the following lines: in order to perceive the similarity between two red spots, perceiving the two red spots is sufficient, making an additional perception of a *relation of similarity* between them unnecessary.¹

In the final decades of the 19th century relations finally made their entrance into logic and ontology as fully legitimate entities. Gottlob Frege’s new approach to predicate calculus, based on the notions of function and argument and the quantifier/variable notation, had succeeded in putting polyadic predicates on the same level as monadic ones: relations could finally be treated in the same way as properties. This strongly contributed to eliminating the distrust of relations. But Frege was not alone in this venture: suffice it to remember, among the logicians, Augustus De Morgan, Charles Sanders Peirce, Ernst Schröder.² Bertrand Russell made his own contribution to the

1 This attempt was made, for example, by James Mill in *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, 1829, XIV, 2, but was criticized by John Stuart Mill for being too simplistic (see Editor’s [scil. John Stuart Mill’s] Note to the 1869 edition, vol. II, pp. 17–20).

2 Augustus De Morgan, ‘On the Syllogism, no. IV, and on the Logic of Relations’, *Transactions of the Cambridge Philosophical Society*, X (1859), pp. 331–58; Charles Sanders Peirce, ‘Description of a Notation for the Logic of Relations, resulting from an Amplification of the Conceptions of Boole’s Calculus of Logic’, *Memoirs of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, N.S.: IX (1873), pp. 317–78; Ernst Schröder, *Algebra und Logic der Relative* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1895).

logic of relations,³ and was especially prominent in insisting on the indispensability of relations. Perhaps more than anyone else, Russell emphasized the importance of relations from a general philosophical point of view, and criticized any attempt to reduce them to other entities. More or less in the same period relations made their triumphant entrance in psychology as well: in the chapter on the “Stream of thought” in his *Principles of Psychology* (New York, Henry Holt and Co., 1890), William James maintained that there is experience not only of a succession of “punctiform” and unconnected ideas, but also of *relations*, “fringes” and tendencies, and that the stream of consciousness is an alternation of *flights* and perchings.

In 20th-century philosophy we are accustomed to considering relations fully respectable entities, or at least as fully respectable as properties. British idealism, on the contrary, flourished in the context of a philosophical framework that both cronologically and culturally precedes the complete legitimation of relations. It is, therefore, interesting to note that relations play a central role in the philosophies of two of the main representatives of British idealism: T.H. Green (1836-1882) and F.H. Bradley (1848-1924), though, in a sense, both shared the prejudices against relations that were typical of their time. In fact, in a way, the centrality of relations in their philosophies is directly connected to such prejudices. It is also curious that Green’s and Bradley’s attitudes towards relations are opposite in many respects, though Bradley’s views were deeply indebted to Green’s. For Green the existence of relations is at the very basis of his main argument in favour of idealism, and thus relations are, in a sense, a “good” thing. On the contrary, Bradley is especially famous for an argument (the so-called “Bradley’s regress argument”) which, according to widespread interpretations, aims at establishing the impossibility of relations. This story will be examined in some detail and will be proven to be somewhat more tangled.

2. *Thomas H. Green*

Green devoted a great part of his philosophical efforts to the criticism and refutation of empiricism. It is, therefore, somewhat ironic that one of the premises of his idealistic metaphysics is a central tenet of the

3 See for instance Bertrand Russell, ‘Sur la logique des relations avec des applications à la théorie des séries’, *Rivista di matematica* 7 (1901), 115–48.

empiricist (i.e., Lockean) view of relations. Green's metaphysics – as is well known⁴ – can be summarized in three main claims:

- (1) all reality lies in relations;
- (2) only for a thinking consciousness do relations exist;
- (3) there is one eternal consciousness, whose relating activity grounds all reality, and many finite consciousnesses (individual selves), which somehow participate in the eternal one.

Claim (3) is rather obscure and notoriously troublesome, but it does not concern us here. Claim (1) is advanced and argued for in almost all of Green's writings: it is absolutely pervasive in his philosophical production. But in order to establish idealism, claim (1) must be accompanied by claim (2): if reality is in some way constituted by relations, and if relations are the product of the mind's activity, then reality obviously depends on the mind's activity. Claim (2) is also advanced by Green, but it is rarely argued for, at least explicitly. There are passages in which Green seems to realize that (2) is in need of arguments, even more than (1) is: 'That 'all reality lies in relations' will more readily be admitted than that 'only for a thinking consciousness do relations exist' (*Lectures on Logic*, § 18, in *Collected Works of T.H. Green*, ed. by Peter Nicholson, Bristol, Thoemmes, 1997, hereinafter *CW*, vol. II, p. 179); yet, only few lines later we find that 'at any rate one should think that the burden of proof lies with those who hold that relations exist otherwise than as we know them to exist [*scil.* only for a thinking consciousness]' (ibid.). On the whole it seems that Green takes (2) for granted, and that he feels justified in doing so by the fact that even his philosophical opponents (among them Locke) do the same: (2) is thus accepted by Green on the authority of that very tradition which he criticizes.

Obviously enough, the empiricist tradition does not accept (1); and (2) alone does not entail idealism. Rather, it leads to a view according to which one must distinguish between:

- (a) an independent reality that is given to us, with all its determinations, through sensations;

4 For a presentation along similar lines see W.J. Mander, 'Bradley and Green on Relations', in *Idealism, Metaphysics, and Community*, ed. by William Sweet (Burlington: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 55–67.

(b) the operations of the mind (thinking consciousness), which abstracts specific determinations from the reality given to the senses, and then possibly recombines them in a novel way.

This is exactly the view that Green criticized in his works, through a profusion of (somewhat repetitive) arguments. Green points out that independent reality cannot contain relations, as the latter are produced by the mind (by hypothesis), and are thus “unreal”. Empiricists’ reality must therefore be made up of unrelated atoms. Yet, based on decidedly elementary constituents, and on a reality that is completely deprived of any structure, virtually none of the world’s phenomena can be accounted for, not even the most trivial and pervasive ones – or at least this is Green’s contention. For example, without the involvement of thought, one could not even say that *there is a sensation of yellow*, since the notion of *yellow* only takes on a determinate meaning by virtue of the relations it holds with other sensations (because it is different from red, for instance); and relations are – as we know – a product of the mind. Strictly speaking, without the involvement of thought one could not even say that *there is a sensation*, for being a sensation implies a relation to a sentient being. As Green asserts, ‘a consistent sensationalism must be speechless’ (*Introduction to Hume’s “Treatise of Human Nature”*, I, § 45, in *CW*, vol. I, p. 36). In order to avoid such a desperate conclusion, the empiricist tradition often resorted to cheating, by surreptitiously “injecting” in the sense data something that could not be present there, as it is produced by the conscious activity of the mind; then, with a sort of sleight of hand, empiricists thought they could extract these “injected” elements through the process of abstraction. But, as Green never tired of repeating, ‘It is clear [...] that it is impossible to abstract an idea that is not *there*, in real existence, to be abstracted’ (*Introduction to Hume’s “Treatise of Human Nature”*, I, § 39, in *CW*, vol. I, p. 31). Another empiricist gambit that is often criticized by Green consists in substituting the experience of some events related to one another with a series of experiences that are, in some way, connected to one another. The experience of a succession of events (which requires the presence of the relation of *succession* in the experienced reality) cannot be accounted for as a succession of experiences.⁵

Generally speaking, for Green the reality of a thing ultimately consists of its relations with other things, at least with the mind

5 James Mill commonly employed this sort of trick: see footnote 1 above.

that knows it: 'A sensation can only form an object of experience in being determined by an intelligent subject which distinguishes it from itself and contemplates it in relation to other sensations' (*Prolegomena to Ethics*, § 44, in *CW*, vol. IV, p. 47). If all relations are removed, things themselves are removed. Yet, in Green's philosophy relations are not only crucial for the constitution of reality in this very general and comprehensive sense: they are also crucial in accounting for the difference between reality in a narrower sense (for instance, what is experienced while awake) and what is not real in this sense (for instance, what is experienced in dreams). For Green reality is constituted (produced) first and foremost by the activity of the eternal consciousness, and only secondarily by the activity of the finite individual minds (more exactly, only insofar as the latter participate in the former). What is vulgarly referred to as "unreal" is just that which does not find its place in a system of relations that is stable, permanent, consistent and intersubjectively available (as in the case of the disconnected experiences of dreams); that is to say, that which is only partly integrated in the all-encompassing and coherent system of relations that is established by the eternal consciousness. Such an interconnectedness among things is for Green the only possible criterion of reality, which is defined as 'a single and unalterable system of relations' (*Prolegomena to Ethics*, § 21, in *CW*, vol. IV, p. 25).

It should be noted that the central idea of Green's metaphysics, i.e., that everything is constituted by relations, and therefore is in some sense reducible to relations, seems to present a grave complication. On the one hand we have the view according to which the terms of the relations (as everything else) are constituted by relations themselves (that is, all the features of the terms depend on the relations the terms are in); on the other hand, it remains that relations, in order to *be* relations, need terms, as something distinct from relations. It would, therefore, seem that the terms cannot be reduced to relations *without any residue*, but this is inconsistent with the original view. In the context of Green's philosophy, the ultimate terms of relations are sensations. In order to avoid the absurd conclusion that there are relations, but there is nothing that they relate, sensations must be admitted into existence independently of relations. Yet, Green often insisted that everything that can be said about such sensations comes from the fact that they are terms of relations, so that sensations, when considered in isolation, are "ineffable". The entire question seems

rather muddled. It has been discussed several times,⁶ and Green himself was fully aware of the problem (see *Prolegomena to Ethics*, §§ 42-51, in *CW*, vol. IV, pp. 45-54; *Lectures on Logic*, § 20, *CW*, vol. II, pp. 181-182; *Lectures on the Philosophy of Kant*, §§ 4-5, in *CW*, vol. II, pp. 5-9). Green's solution is not completely clear, but its essence is that similar objections are based on a mistaken view of abstraction. According to Green, while it is true that we can abstract terms (mere sensations) and relations from the whole they constitute together, this does not mean that terms and relations exist – or can exist – separately. Green's answer presents some obvious difficulties. First of all, it does not allow for the asymmetry between terms and relations which is vital to Green's philosophy. Interestingly enough, it is also based on a view of abstraction that seems to conflict with Green's own view of it. As it has been shown, in criticizing the use of abstraction made by empiricists, Green held that it is impossible to abstract an idea that is not already *there*. This remark now acts as a boomerang against Green himself: if terms (mere abstractions) can be abstracted at all, this means that they have already been there: in other words, that they must have some sort of existence independent of relations.

3. *Francis H. Bradley*

Relations hold a central place in Green's world, due to their constitutive role. On the other hand, Bradley, though indebted to Green in many respects, is mostly famous for an argument – the so-called regress argument – whose conclusion according to some interpreters is that relations (or at least external relations) are contradictory, and therefore impossible. Thus there is one British idealist philosopher for which relations are at the very centre of reality (and are also crucial in establishing idealism), and another British idealist philosopher for which relations (or at least external relations) seem not to exist at all. It is neither possible to examine Bradley's philosophy in its entirety here, nor to analyze some of its aspects in detail. Rather, we shall limit

6 See W.J. Mander, 'In Defence of the Eternal Consciousness', in *T.H. Green. Ethics, Politics, and Political Philosophy*, ed. by Maria Dimova-Cookson and W.J. Mander (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006, pp. 187–206), pp. 198–200; Peter Hylton, *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), pp. 37–38.

ourselves to understanding whether the aforementioned opposition is a faithful picture of the two philosophers' views, or if the story is – as one might suppose – more intricate.

The regress argument is put forth at different points in Bradley's works, and its formulation is not always exactly the same. Yet, it might be summarized in the following way. Let us suppose that we must account for the fact that two things are in some way connected to one another. It is fair to assume that the analysis of this situation requires something more than a mere list of the two things in question, since the two things could well be given and their being connected could nevertheless not be given. At this point one could introduce a new element – a relation – to account for the two things being connected. But now we must provide an account of the fact that *three* elements are connected: the two original things and the relation. It seems that, in this case as well, a mere list of the three constituents is not enough, since the three constituents could well be given and their being connected could nevertheless not be given. We could be tempted to introduce new relations, in order to account for the connection between the first relation and the two things. But the same problem would clearly arise regardless of the number of newly added relations. We have thus embarked on a plainly vicious regress.

The argument is most assuredly formulated in terms of relations, and there is a quite obvious sense in which it amounts to a criticism of relations.⁷ Yet, the true objective of Bradley's criticism is seemingly a different one; and that does not (or not only) have to do with relations in particular, but with the more general question of the unity of complexes, which transcends the particular case of relations. Several scholars today agree that the real issue Bradley dealt with when it came to his regress argument is the latter;⁸ furthermore, most contemporary

7 The question of whether such a criticism concerns relations in general or only external relations is rather tangled, both for exegetical reasons, and because of the later debate on internal vs. external relations, with which Bradley's argument came to be closely intertwined. Consequently, the entire question will be left aside. For a thorough discussion of the issue see Stewart Candlish, *The Russell/Bradley Dispute and its Significance for Twentieth-Century Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007).

8 See, among others, Peter Hylton, 'The Nature of the Proposition and the Revolt against Idealism', in *Philosophy in History. Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy*, ed. by Richard Rorty, J.B. Schneewind and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 375–97; Kenneth Russell Olson, *An Essay on Facts* (Stanford: Center for the

philosophical debates on the regress make the same assumption.⁹ The real issue is thus the analysis of complexes (such as facts) into their constituents: is it possible to analyze a complex into its constituents, *without any residue*? The gist of Bradley's regress argument is that it is not possible, whatever the number of constituents we are willing to include on the list. In other words, every analysis (conceived of in this way) is, in reality, a falsification. This conclusion is fully consonant with the holistic inclinations that are characteristic of idealism in general and of Bradley's idealism in particular.

But what about relations? Do they, after all, exist in Bradley's world or not? And what role do they play? As is often the case with Bradley – and that can be somewhat disappointing – no clear-cut and univocal answer is available. For Bradley relations are associated with the activity of thought. One could almost say that thought is by its very nature *relational*, in that it connects separate elements into progressively wider unities. In order to understand how this all works, it is helpful to focus on judgment, which is the operation of thought responsible for making connections. According to Bradley, judgment is not – as it is for the empiricist tradition – the combination of two ideas or representations (i.e., subject and predicate), but rather the attribution of a unified content (which includes both subject and predicate) to reality, which is the only true subject. For example: the judgment that the goat is white does not consist in the combination of the idea of goat (the subject) with that of whiteness (the predicate), but rather in the attribution of the complex ideal content *the goat is white* to reality; the best approximation to the real form of such a judgment is probably something to the effect of “Reality is such that the goat is white”. However, every finite judgment is valid only under some implicit assumptions, which concern different background features of the situation that are not explicitly considered. To use our previous example, the goat is white is true only against the background of a

Study of Language and Information, 1987), chapter III; Peter Hylton, *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*; Luigi Cimmino, *Il cemento dell'universo. Riflessioni su F.H. Bradley* (Siena: Cantagalli, 2008), especially chapter I; Guido Bonino, 'Bradley's Regress: Relations, Exemplification, Unity', *Axiomathes* 23 (2013) 189–200. For a historical survey of the different interpretations of Bradley's regress argument, see Guido Bonino, 'The Unity of the Proposition – The Rise of a Philosophical Problem', *Conceptus* 39 (2010), 101–25.

9 See Guido Bonino, 'Bradley's Regress: Relations, Exemplification, Unity', p. 190, footnote 2 for some brief bibliographical indications.

theory of colours, according to which, say, the goat, being white, cannot be red. Knowledge advances as it subsumes within the judgment all the conditions hitherto implicit. Judgment thus increasingly expands: from the goat to the whole universe – through a process that is presumably never-ending. In other words, elements that have previously been separate, come to be connected together by means of relations. Such a process is perfectly analogous, from a structural point of view, to that in which consciousness establishes relations, as described by Green. It is clear that in Bradley's process of unification relations are granted a fundamental role, not unlike that granted to them by Green.

However, Bradley's idealism is *sui generis*: it does not admit the Hegel-like rationalism which is among Green's characteristic traits. For Bradley thought is not all-powerful, and its range of application is limited – so to speak – in two directions: below and above. Below there is what Bradley refers to as “immediate feeling”. Immediate feeling has its own kind of inner diversity, yet it is not divided into parts (it is a typical instance of the idealistic *identity in difference*). In a way, immediate feeling contains the whole reality, but in an unarticulated form (Green would have probably called it “speechless”). In order to be able to operate, thought must break up immediate feeling into countless separate elements. Among such separate elements are also relations, which will then allow thought to commit to the endless task of putting the pieces together. But the operations of thought are always imperfect, as demonstrated by the contradictory nature of relations that is exposed by the regress argument. Thought can try to recreate some sort of spurious unity starting from the constituents in which the whole has been divided; but such a spurious unity is only an imperfect likeness of the original unity which can be found in the immediate feeling – below.

According to Bradley, there is another form of genuine unity, in addition to the original one: it is a sort of final unity. Thought, as has already been remarked, is limited above as well. It always tries to unify separate elements into increasingly comprehensive judgments, but this process cannot have an end. Even if thought succeeded in formulating an all-embracing judgment (in which all the implicit assumptions are made explicit and incorporated into the judgment itself), the latter would just be an attempt to identify reality with an ideal content (albeit the “richest” among ideal contents). But there is always a chasm between reality and ideal contents, if only because reality is an individual, whereas an ideal content is necessarily universal (as is all

thought).¹⁰ Beyond thought there is what Bradley calls the “Absolute”. Like immediate feeling, the Absolute is a unified whole, endowed with an inner diversity, but devoid of parts. Its unity is a *non-relational* unity, exactly like that of immediate feeling.¹¹ It is not by chance that the Absolute, like immediate feeling, is ineffable: immediate feeling is below speech, the Absolute is above. Between the two extremes lies the domain of thought, and relations unquestionably belong to this domain.

We shall conclude this section with some comparative remarks on the role of relations in Green’s and Bradley’s philosophy. Green’s relations perform a unifying function: they “keep the world together” and, in doing so, they “constitute” the world itself. For Bradley there are two domains, i.e., that of immediate feeling and that of the Absolute, which possess a peculiar kind of non-relational unity. There is nothing of this in Green: there is neither an infra-relational immediate feeling, nor a supra-relational Absolute. In the domain of thought relations perform a similar function in both Green and Bradley: they act as a thrust towards, and at the same time as a means to, unification itself. Bradley’s thought, on the other hand, aims at a complete unification (without ever being able to attain it), but at the same time it is responsible for the fragmentation of the whole into separate parts: in order to unify, one must first come into possession of the parts to be unified.

4. *A final remark*

If the reconstruction of Bradley’s regress argument that has been summarized is roughly correct, then one question might easily arise. If the chief problem that is addressed by Bradley’s regress argument concerns the unity of complexes, why is the argument itself formulated as if it concerned the existence or the nature of relations? After all, relational complexes seem to be only a special case of the more general problem of the unity of complexes. The same problem concerning unity could be raised even with respect to the case of an individual exemplifying a property: that *this spot is yellow* is indeed a complex, even if no relations

10 At a linguistic level, the difference corresponds to that between proper names and definite descriptions: reality can only be referred to by a proper name, whereas thought can only work by means of definite descriptions.

11 One might speak of the *infra-relational* unity of immediate feeling and the *supra-relational* unity of the Absolute.

at all occur. A general formulation of the problem would have certainly been more straightforward. Or at least that is what would seem sensible to *us*, who are accustomed to a logical and philosophical culture in which relations and properties are regarded as being on the same level.

The whole issue could be partly spurious, and dependent on terminological misunderstanding: the fact that *this spot is yellow* could also be given a relational analysis, based on the connection between an individual spot and the universal property *yellow* by means of a relation of exemplification. Yet there is perhaps a more interesting historical reason that may contribute explaining why the problem of the unity of complexes is formulated in terms of relations. The empiricist tradition was often deliberately superficial with regard to ontological/categorical classifications,¹² but its overall inclination was certainly nominalistic. Due to both this superficiality and to the nominalistic tendency, the empiricist tradition handed down a legacy that favoured the confusion – or at least the lack of a clear distinction – between an individual exemplifying a property (i.e., a fact, and therefore a complex) and a bare property, conceived of (nominalistically, but implicitly) as a trope. Thus the complex nature of facts such as *this spot is yellow* could easily go unnoticed. For some reasons, no confusion of the sort had ever been made between a relational fact and a bare relation.¹³

It should be noted that Bradley seems to have been deeply aware of this whole dialectic. This is especially clear in his unfinished and posthumously published paper on *Relations* (*Collected Essays*, 1930). In this paper Bradley attempts to elaborate on his view regarding relations, and in this context he makes an explicit distinction between *relations* and *relational situations* (relational facts, as we would say). This provided an opportunity to deal once more with the problem of the unity of complexes, in a way that makes it clear that the problem itself is not necessarily associated with questions concerning the nature of relations, but is a more general one. This approach to the problem completely ignores the alternative between internal and external relations, which is regarded as relatively shallow and irrelevant with respect to the issue.

12 For some interesting considerations on the effects of a similarly superficial attitude in G.E. Moore's works, see Herbert Hochberg, *Thought, Fact, and Reference. The Origins and Ontology of Logical Atomism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), pp. 22–23.

13 This is most likely because even a convinced nominalist must recognize that a relational fact involves at least *two* individual constituents, and that makes it *complex*.

It is also remarkable that Bradley's reflections on the unity of complexes in this paper closely resemble – though formulated with different terminology and in a different conceptual framework – Bertrand Russell's treatment of the same topic in *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903). Both philosophers were clearly dealing with the question of whether it is possible to account for the unity of a complex on the basis of its constituents. As it is widely known, their answers were different: it is not possible, according to Bradley; it is possible (or it *must* be possible), according to Russell. But this is beside the point. What is interesting here is that the real point of disagreement between Russell and Bradley was the question of the unity of complexes, and *not* the opposition between internal and external relations. The latter issue was only a bit player in the debate, notwithstanding Russell's own polemical reconstruction of the debate itself. By contrast, Bernard Bosanquet formulated his opposition to Russell on this matter in more traditional terms. In the second edition of his *Logic, or the Morphology of Knowledge* (1911), Bosanquet tackled the problem by inquiring whether relations can be external, or must be internal (*relevant*, as Bosanquet liked to say): in other words, whether relations modify (or in some way constitute) their terms or not. This formulation is superficially more akin to the way in which Russell mostly fashioned the issue, but it does not reach the root of the problem.